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# ***Effects of Humor on Project Management***

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## Agenda

Humor relevance and definition

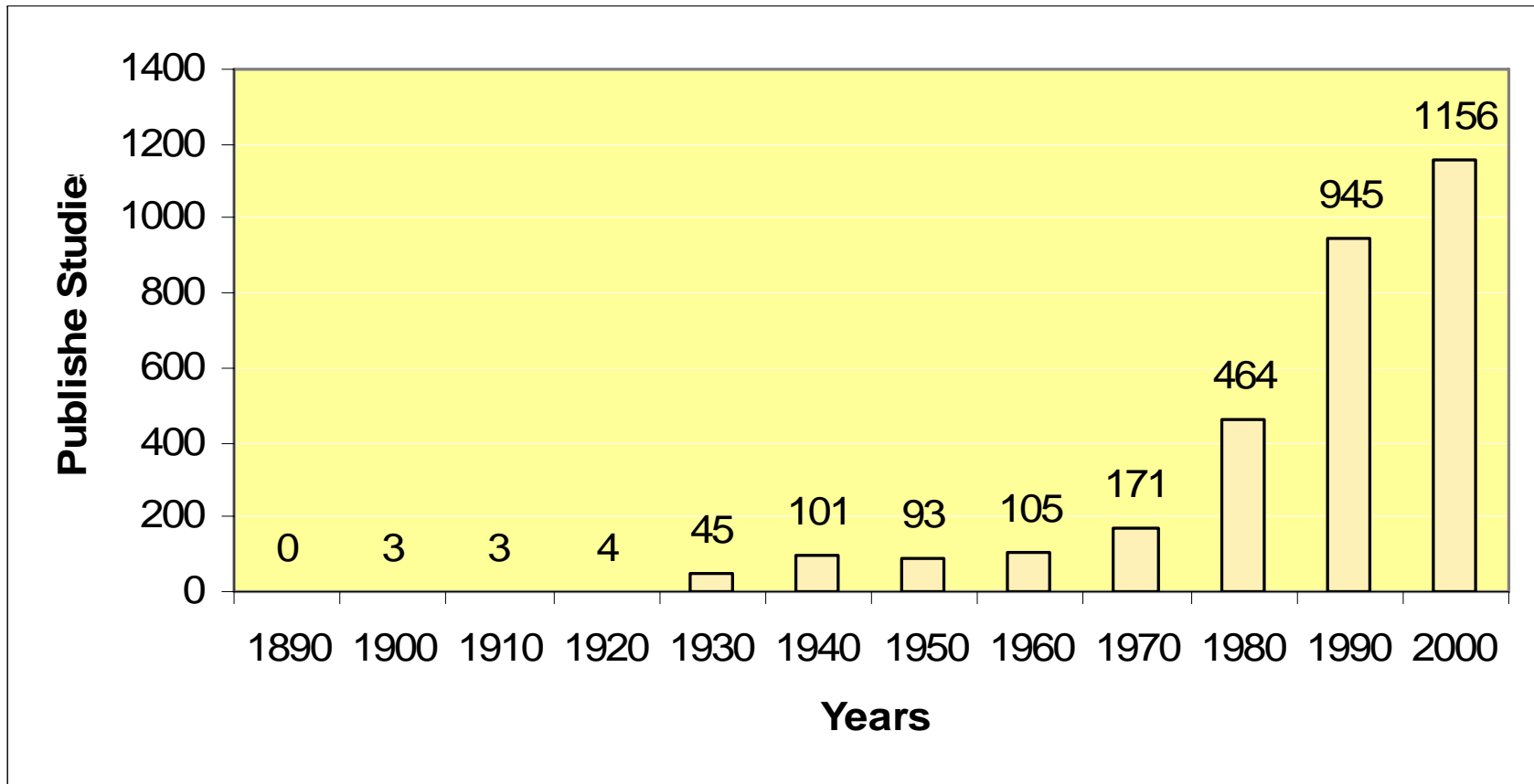
Humor effects on soft skills

Humor effects on hard skills

Conclusions

Future researches

## The growth of humor studies (Source: PsycINFO)



## Relevance of the topic

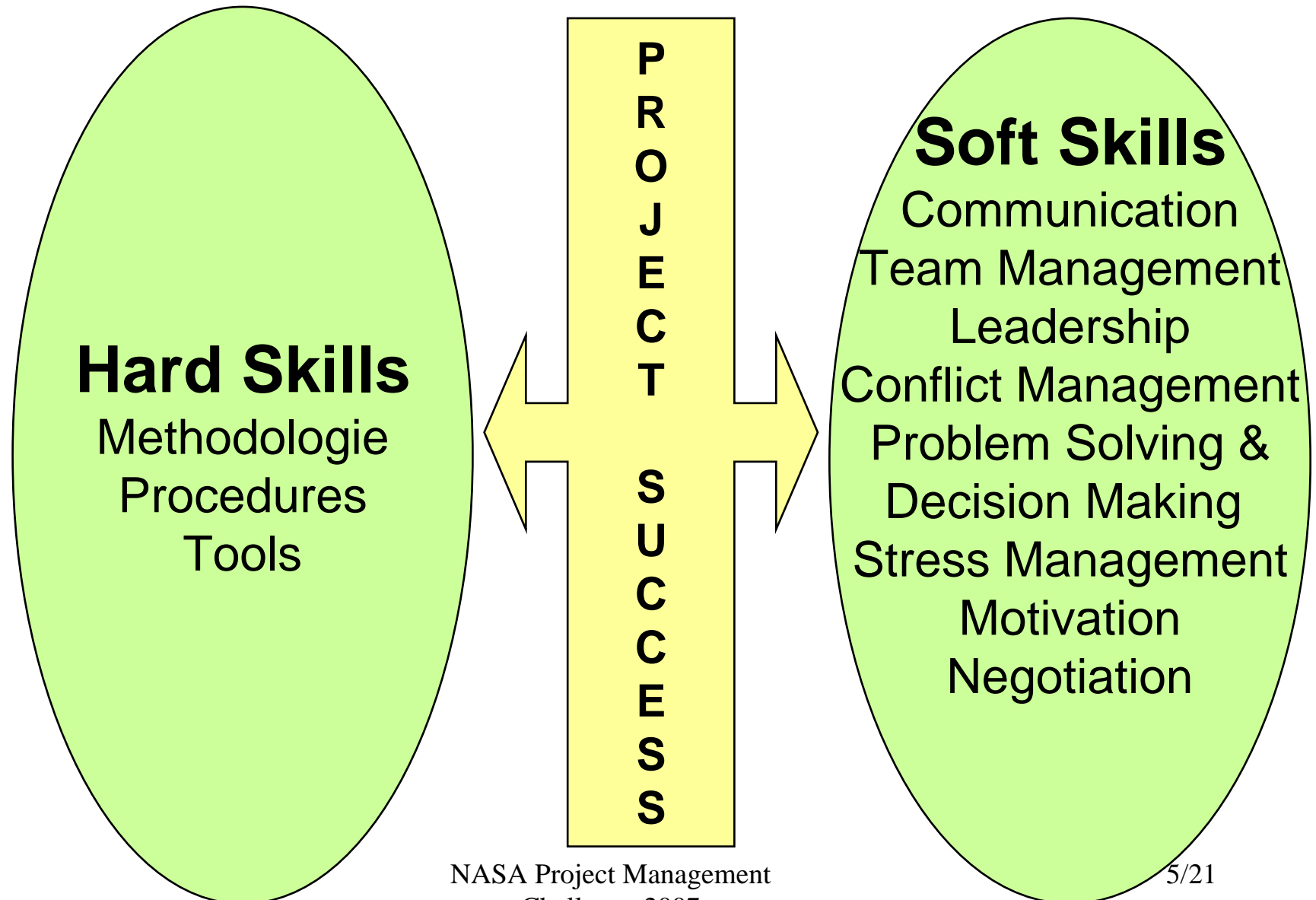
In the past humor has not been taken into serious consideration.

Humor, while fascinating humanity since recorder history, has not led to the persistent pursuit of crucial knowledge.

In the last 20 years psychologist and sociologist have taken a more rigorous and systematic approach toward humor.

The study of humor at work and in workgroups is only at the beginning.

# Project Success and Humor: the Framework



## Definition of humor

Humor can be defined as a state of mind, as the quality of causing amusement, and as the ability to understand and enjoy what is funny and makes people laugh.

(Source: Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture 1998)

## Communication

People keep more attention toward speakers that use a humorous style.

Humor improves the information retention. This characteristic can be misused: humor can remark or hide a concept depending on the way it is applied.

Humor improves the persuasiveness of the communication.

## Team Management: Team Building Phase

Humor is a non invasive way to test the relations and gives people that use it a parachute in case of bad responses.

A positive response boosts the use of humor in the other team members, speeding up the socialization process.

A joke can start a chain of humorous interpretations, giving the sensation of consensus among team members.

Humor represents a shared interpretation of events that highlights similarities among team members and creates a sense of equality.



## Team Management: Detecting the Team Morale

The spontaneous use of humor is not always an indicator of personal or organizational well being.

Humor is also used to respond to critical situation, to alleviate anxiety and fear.

Humor is also a response to incongruities and contradictions. Spontaneous humor may be a signal of organizational ambiguity.

## Leadership

A study shows that the use of humor by leaders relates positively to individual and unit performance.

Good leaders are often humor appreciators rather than humor initiators.

Leaders that are humor initiators have a task oriented leadership style.

Leaders that are humor appreciator have a relationship oriented leadership style.

Bad leaders hide part of their inability by mean of humor.

## Conflict Management

Humor in avoidance conflict resolution style. The coping functions of humor permits to lower the emotional involvement related to a situation and to change the dominant cognitive perspective.

Humor in confronting conflict resolution style. Humor, mostly in the form of metaphors, shows the situation under different perspectives thus permitting people to deal with a broader set of alternatives.

## Conflict Management

Humor in smoothing conflict resolution style. Humor can be used to augment the positiveness of a situation, playing down differences and thus attempting to create a common ground.

Humor in compromising conflict resolution style. Humor can be used to convey ambiguous messages to express ideas that, if communicated directly, would offend others.

## Conflict Management

Humor in forcing conflict resolution style. Humor can express hostility and aggressiveness. Embedding aggressive messages in a humorous form is perceived less risky for the sender and less hostile for the receiver but leaves intact the meaning.

Not permitting conflicts to come to light can be dangerous, it has been shown that humor does not hide or suppress conflicts.

## Negotiation

Humor increases the likeability of a communicator and liked communicators have more influential power.

Humor lower the perceived importance of the object of the negotiation, thus conducting to greater concessions.

In negotiations humor can thus play a double role, depending on the part one take.

## Motivation

Humor can influence sense of hope. Humor leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy in dealing with specific problems or stressful events.

Humor works both on agency and pathways dimensions, producing an increase in motivation.

## Problem Solving and Decision Making

External humorous stimuli can positively affect problem solving and creativity. Humor lowers tension and improves divergent thinking.

In decision making, humor can reveal a negative effect related to the perception of risk. Humor tends to lower the importance of the discussed topic, thus, risky activities can be underestimated. The effect on hope and motivation may also play a negative role in these situations.



## Stress Management

Humor, especially in the outcome of laughing, helps in reducing the negative effects of stress.

Humor has also a positive effect on difficult situations because produces a cognitive shift that show them as less stressful and less emotional. However, this can be dangerous when the situation may cause risks.

## Hard Skills

Hard skills must be learned and then applied.

Humor and learning hard skills. Incorporating humor in lecture materials improves listeners/readers attention, their ability to set connections between concepts or find inconsistencies, and the information retention. Humor is strongly preferable in self-education activities.

Humor and the application of hard skills. The focus shifts from the specific methodology to the way it is used. Using a funny approach is important during the introduction of new methodologies.

## Conclusions and Guidelines

Humor can be leveraged as a managerial tool. The comprehension of its effects can be used to influence people behavior and thus project outcomes.

Humor has not always positive meanings and positive effects, so trying to detect criticalities that lay behind humor is a non-trivial activity.

Standardizing the use of humor can be counterproductive, it is better to promote a positive climate that produce spontaneous humor. Canned humor can be used but the risk to be unnatural could be high.

## Current and future researches

Use and effects of humor in multicultural teams

Humor and team performance

Learning humor

Humor dosage



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***Thank You for Your Attention***

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